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ABSTRACT

This briefing sheet provides a summary of statistics (primarily from United Kingdom and Dutch surveys) that relate to the participation of older people in learning. It provides evidence of current participation, recent trends, types of learning in which older people are involved, future intentions, and correlation between learning in later life and initial education. References for the surveys can be found at the end of the briefing sheet, along with the definitions of learning used. Twenty surveys and statistics are listed. (Key findings include the following: participation in learning declines with age, falling dramatically for those aged 65 and over; the number of learners aged 75 and over fell by a third between 1996-2002; older learners participate in non-vocational, non-accredited courses; older learners prefer daytime classes; the number of older learners involved in higher education is minimal; the earlier a person left school, the less likely he or she is subsequently to undertake any form of formal learning; those with a lower educational level run a greater risk of ending up in an institution than those with a higher education and at a somewhat younger age; and according to a Dutch forecast, changes in educational level of older people occur only through the replacement of older, less educated cohorts by younger, better-educated cohorts, rather than as a result of adult education, migration, or difference in life expectancy.) (YLB)

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Older People and Learning–Some Key Statistics

NIACE Briefing Sheet 32
September 2002

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Older people and learning – some key statistics

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Background

This briefing sheet provides a summary of recent key statistics relating to the participation of older people in learning. Taken from the latest surveys, it provides evidence of current participation, recent trends, the types of learning that older people are involved in, future intentions, and the correlation between learning in later life and initial education. We also raise some issues for consideration.

This is the thirty-second in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues.

Also available:

21. Who learns – key participation facts
22. Promoting language learning for adults
23. Fees charged to part-time adult students 2000-2001
24. Neighbourhood renewal
25. Mailgroups
26. Sources of funding for older learners
27. Workforce development
28. Black and minority ethnic learners
29. Young adult learners
30. Meeting the needs of older learners – a briefing for LSCs
31. Financial literacy and older people

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The surveys quoted vary in their definitions of learning, the range of age groups surveyed, and methodology. The references for the surveys can be found at the end of the briefing sheet, along with the definitions of learning used. It is our intention to update this information annually.

Summary of key findings

- Participation in learning declines with age, falling dramatically for those aged 65 and over.
- The number of learners aged 75 and over fell by a third between 1996 and 2002.
- More older learners participate in non-vocational, non-accredited courses than vocational and accredited courses.
- The number of older learners involved in higher education is minimal. (Only 0.4% of first year full time undergraduates in 1999/2000 were aged 50 or over).
- The earlier a person left school, the less likely he or she is subsequently to undertake any form of formal learning.
- Those with a lower educational level run a greater risk of ending up in an institution than those with a higher education, and at a somewhat younger age.
- According to a Dutch forecast, changes in educational level of older people occur only through the replacement of older, less educated cohorts by younger, better-educated cohorts, rather than as a result of adult education, migration or difference in life expectancy.

2002: Current participation of older people in learning

Participation in learning, by age, 2002

	Total	17-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
Base: all respondents = 100%	4,896	250	336	887	1,002	757	705	583	375
Current learning	23	61	45	24	25	24	14	11	5
Recent learning (in the last 3 years)	19	17	27	26	24	20	16	9	5
All current/recent learning	42	78	72	51	49	44	30	20	10
Past learning (more than 3 years ago)	21	2	11	21	22	23	25	25	27
None since leaving full-time education/ don't know	36	20	17	28	29	33	45	55	63

Source: Two steps forward, one step back. NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2002.

Key findings:

- In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to participate in learning.
- Three in ten of those aged 55-64 are current/recent participants in learning compared to around half of those in the 25-54 age group.
- Current/recent participation falls dramatically for those aged 65 and over.
- The decline in participation in later years often coincides with leaving work.

Issues for consideration

- Recent evidence points to the health benefits of continued learning in later life and the positive effects for quality of life, lessening dependency and reducing care costs. The importance of learning among older people in dependency and care settings should be recognised, and those involved in care and activities for older people in care settings should receive training and support to provide learning opportunities.
- Labour market concerns continue to dominate in education and skills policy, yet increased longevity among retired groups points to the need for participation later in life.
- There is a need to reach and engage those aged 65 and over in learning.

Since 1996: recent trends

The following tables show the result of surveys carried out by NIACE and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) over recent years looking at participation in learning by age.

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NIACE surveys

Percentage of age groups currently/recently participating in learning, by age: 1996, 1999 and 2002 compared

	1996	1999	2002
Base: all respondents = 100%	40	40	42
17-19	86	81	78
20-24	65	70	72
25-35	48	50	51
35-44	43	47	49
45-54	36	41	44
55-64	25	30	30
65-74	19	16	20
75+	15	9	10

Source: NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Surveys

DfES Surveys

Percentage of age groups reporting some learning

	1997	2001	% change
Base: all respondents= 100%	5245	6451	
16-19	82	76	-6
20-29	85	86	+1
30-39	82	83	+1
40-49	78	80	+2
50-59	67	74	+7
60-69	47	49	+2
70+	N/A	25	N/A

Source: DfES National Adult Learning Survey, 2001

Although the NIACE survey has a stable and consistent relationship with the DfES National Adult Learning Survey (NALS), differences in the methods of data collection, the definitions of learning and the age cohorts surveyed result in the findings of the NIACE survey being consistently markedly lower than those generated by NALS.

Key findings:

- Between 1996 and 2002, participation rates in all age groups, except for those aged between 17-19 and those aged over 75, increased.
- According to NIACE surveys, the greatest rise in participation between 1996 and 2002 has been among those aged 45-54.
- NIACE surveys show that the number of learners aged 75+ has fallen by a third between 1996 and 2002.

Issues for consideration:

- The consistent fall in the number of learners aged 75+ over the last seven years is a cause for concern.
- There is a need to standardise age bands in surveys to ease comparison.

Learning by sector

Adult education

Local Education Authority (LEA)

Adult education enrolments by mode, type of funding and age, England, November 2000 (with 1998 for comparison)

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Mode	Type of provision	All men	Men aged 60+		All women	Women age 60+	
		No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%
Daytime	Non-vocational, non-accredited	74,231	35,326	47.6	270,586	116,704	43.1
	Vocational, accredited	61,701	10,815	17.5	151,502	17,526	11.5
	Total	135,932	46,141	33.9	422,088	134,230	31.9
Evening	Non-vocational, non-accredited	98,025	21,842	22.2	252,355	41,276	16.4
	Vocational, accredited	50,783	5,959	11.7	108,137	7,092	6.5
	Total	148,808	27,801	18.7	360,492	48,368	13.4
Total	Non-vocational, non-accredited	172,256	57,168	33.2	522,941	157,980	30.2
	Vocational, accredited	112,484	16,774	14.9	25,9639	24,618	9.5
	Total (2000)	284,740	73,942	26.0	782,580	182,598	23.3
	Total (1998)	290,908	68,461	23.5	832,972	178,686	21.5

Source: DfES Adult education enrolments (AE1) return. (Oct 2001)

Key findings:

- Over 40% of daytime students on non-vocational, non-accredited courses are aged 60+, compared to less than 20% on vocational and accredited courses.
- The proportions for evening provision almost halve for men and women – highlighting the preference of older people for daytime activity.
- Between 1998 and 2000 there was a slight improvement in the number of enrolments in adult education from people aged 60+.

Issues for consideration:

- There is a need to plan provision for older learners and to recognise the need for daytime, non-vocational non-accredited courses.
- There is a need to ensure clarity and consistency of approach around fees and concessions.
- The number of older women learning far outweighs the number of older men. Gender specific strategies need to be employed to reach older men.

Further Education

Further education enrolment of women by age as a percentage, 1996/7 to 1999/2000

	Under 18	19–26	27–45	46–55	56–65	66–80	80+	56+
1999/00	16.5	17.1	42.7	14.1	6.1	3.2	0.3	9.6
1998/99	16.9	18.3	43.2	13.5	5.2	2.6	0.3	8.1
1997/98	17.6	18.9	42.8	13.1	4.9	2.4	0.3	7.6
1996/97	17.7	19.6	42.4	12.8	4.9	2.3	0.3	7.5

Further education enrolments of men by age as a percentage, 1996/7 to 1999/2000

	Under 18	19– 26	27–45	46–55	56–65	66–80	80+	56+
1999/00	23.5	19.3	36.5	11.6	5.8	3.2	0.2	9.2
1998/99	23.1	20.1	37.8	11.4	5.0	2.3	0.2	7.5
1997/98	22.8	20.1	38.6	11.5	4.7	2.0	0.2	6.9

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1996/97	23.1	20.9	38.1	11.2	4.[illegible]	1.8	0.1	6.6

Source: LSC.FE ISR data. Tables compiled from LSC data. (Oct 2001)

Key findings:

- The number of older people is increasing proportionately in further education, with nearly one tenth of students in 1999/2000 aged 56 or over.
- Between 1996/7 and 1999/2000 the number of enrolments of students aged 56+ rose by 34%.

Issues for consideration:

- Older learners are part of the overall widening participation agenda for the FE sector.
- Partnerships with other providers and older peoples' organisations can build innovative and effective ways of reaching and engaging older people.
- Despite the rise in participation, the numbers of older learners in further education are still extremely low.

Higher education

- In 1999/2000 only 0.4% of first year full time undergraduate students were aged 50 or over, 15.5% of part time equivalents. **(Source: HESA Services Ltd Nov 2001 data as requested by NIACE)**
- In 1999/2000 1.0% of full time first year postgraduate students were aged 50 or over, 7.8% of part time students.
- The Open University is the exception to the low level of participation of older learners in higher education. Its profile of students aged over 50 rose from 12.2% of students in 1994 to 16.3% in 2000/1. **(Source: email to NIACE from OU Director of Partnerships Nov 2001)**

Issues for consideration:

- The upper age limit on student loans (55) denies older people the opportunity to access full-time higher education, yet at the same time the government is encouraging older people to fulfil a role as responsible, socially-included citizens.
- A review of the funding arrangements for HE is needed. Although the number of older adults involved in higher education is likely to be small, they should not be denied the opportunity to participate.
- The life, work and family experiences of older people can be the equivalent of A-Level and similar qualifications as indicators of ability to benefit from HE.

Types of learning

Percentage of age groups reporting different types of learning

	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Base: all respondents = 100%							
Any learning	76	86	83	80	74	49	25
Taught learning	56	70	66	63	55	32	15
Self-directed learning	47	70	67	64	59	34	15
Vocational learning	63	84	79	75	65	28	5
Non-vocational learning	27	20	23	23	28	30	22

Source: DfES National Adult Learning Survey, 2001

Key findings:

- The 2001 NALS data confirm the results from the 1997 NALS, showing a tendency for

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learning to decline as age increases.

- However, a higher percentage of learners in the 50-59 and 60-69 age groups participate in non-vocational learning than younger age groups.
- The decline in participation between younger and older age groups is more marked in vocational learning than the other types.

Issues for consideration:

- The decline in participation in vocational learning may relate to employers not investing in vocational learning, or individuals thinking that it has little to do with them.

Learner satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with teaching/training

Accredited Adult and Community Learning		**Gender**		**Age within gender**		
	Total	Male	Female	Female <35	Female 35-54	Female 55+
Base: All respondents = 100%	723	192	531	167	237	127
Extremely satisfied	32	28	33	28	38	31
Very satisfied	44	42	44	48	40	48
Fairly satisfied	19	24	17	17	17	17
Neither/nor	1	0	2	2	2	0
Fairly/very/extremely dissatisfied	4	6	3	4	4	3
Mean (out of 7 where 7=extremely satisfied and 1=extremely dissatisfied)	5.9	5.8	6.0	5.9	6.0	6.0

Source: LSC Learner Satisfaction Survey, 2001/2
Note: Age within males is not included due to low base numbers

Key findings:

- The first Learner Satisfaction Survey, carried out for the Learning and Skills Council shows that in the area in which older age groups were surveyed (accredited adult and community learning), age has an impact on satisfaction with learning.
- The older the learner, the more likely they are to be to say that they get a buzz from learning (89% for the 55+ age group compared to 59% for 16-18 year olds).
- 55+ learners are much more likely to say that the course had made them feel good/motivated, as if they were going somewhere (16% compared with just 3% of the youngest learners).
- 55+ learners experience significantly fewer problems when learning than those aged below the age of 55. Problems relate mainly to juggling commitments and keeping up with the standard of work required. Interestingly, these learners are less likely to seek advice or help.
- Females aged 55+ are much more likely taking courses for personal reasons than other learners.

Issues for consideration:

- Older learners who are learning in the accredited adult and community learning sector are motivated and enjoying their learning experiences.
- There is scope for older learners to be encouraged to seek advice and help if they need it.

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Future intentions

Future intentions to take up learning, by age, 2002

	Total	17-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
Base: all respondents = 100%	4,896	250	336	887	1,002	757	705	583	375
Total likely	41	72	63	59	50	42	23	12	7
Total unlikely	57	23	33	38	48	56	75	86	92

Source: Two steps forward, one step back. NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2002.

Future intentions to take up learning, by age, 1996 and 2002 compared

	Total	17–19	20–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+
Total likely									
1996	38	71	58	49	47	37	20	14	10
2002	41	72	63	59	50	42	23	12	7
% change	+3	+1	+5	+10	+3	+5	+3	-2	-3
Total unlikely									
1996	55	19	35	42	45	57	76	82	83
2002	57	23	33	38	48	56	75	86	92
% change	+2	+4	-2	-4	+3	-1	-1	+4	+9

Key findings:

- Between 1996 and 2002, there has been an 11-16% increase in future intentions to learn among the working age population.
- Worryingly, during the same period, future intentions to learn fell from 14% to 12% for those aged 65-75 and from 10% to 7% for those aged 75 and over.

Importance of initial education

The school-leaving age was only raised to age 16 in 1974, and NIACE research has consistently shown a correlation between the age of leaving school and the likelihood of returning to any form of education.

Participation in learning by age of finishing formal education

	Total	Up to 16	17 – 18	19 – 20	21+
Base: all respondents = 100%	5,054	3,130	781	207	688
Current learning	22	13	27	28	32
Recent learning	18	14	26	27	29
All current/recent learning	**40**	**28**	**53**	**55**	**61**
Past learning	23	23	26	26	26
None since full-time education	**37**	**49**	**21**	**19**	**13**

Source: The learning divide revisited. NIACE 2000.

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Key findings:

- Those who stayed on in education until age 21 and beyond are more likely to be currently or recently involved in learning (61%). Those who left education before the age of 16 are less likely to have any current or recent involvement in learning (49% none since full-time education).
- The earlier a person left school, the less likely he or she is subsequently to undertake any form of formal learning. Most older people did leave school before age 16 and, as Sargant (2000) indicates, 'the length of initial education continues to be the clearest forward indicator of participation in adult learning'.

Issues for consideration:

- Target those with minimal initial and little or no subsequent formal education.

International comparisons – the Netherlands

This section includes recent statistics from the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands. We have selected this information for inclusion because it highlights interesting and up-to-date government research, which is both useful for comparative purposes and for highlighting areas where it might be useful for the UK to have equivalent data.

Participation in education in the Netherlands

Participation in education by the population (a) aged 55 and over, 1987-1999 (in percentages)

	1987	1991	1995	1999
Men				
Qualifying education	2	2	4	5
Non-qualifying education	11	14	13	13
Total (b)	13	15	16	17
Women				
Qualifying education	1	1	1	4
Non-qualifying education	17	18	19	19
Total (b)	17	19	20	21
Men and women				
Qualifying education	1	1	3	5
Non-qualifying education	14	16	16	16
Total (b)	15	17	18	20

(a) excluding the population in residential care and nursing homes

(b) people can participate in both types of course, which means that the total need not be the same as the sum of the percentages for the individual course types

Source: SCP (AVO'79-'99)

Qualifying education: courses aimed at the attainment of a diploma, geared towards a particular profession or aimed at the acquisition of basic skills

Non-qualifying education: often training and courses of a creative or general developmental nature

Participation in education by population (a) aged 55 and over compared with the adult participation aged 35-54, 1979-1999 (in percentages)

	1987	1991	1995	1999
35-54 years				
Qualifying education	13	14	21	25
Non-qualifying education	25	34	23	24
Total (b)	33	40	37	41

55+				
Qualifying education	1	1	3	5
Non-qualifying education	14	16	16	16
Total (b)	15	17	18	20

(a) excluding the population in residential care and nursing homes
(b) people can participate in both types of course, which means that the total need not be the same as the sum of the percentages for the individual course types

Source: SCP (AVO'79-99)

Education level of older people

Education level of the "elderly" compared with adults aged 35-54, 1998a (in percentages)

	35-54 years	≥55 years	55-64 years	65-74 years	≥75 years
Men					
Primary education	11	22	18	23	32
Lower secondary education	19	21	21	22	19
Upper secondary education	40	36	37	35	33
Tertiary education	29	21	24	20	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Women					
Primary education	14	38	25	39	53
Lower secondary education	27	32	36	33	24
Upper secondary education	38	21	27	19	16
Tertiary education	21	9	12	9	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100

a Excluding elderly in residential and nursing homes

Source: Statistics Netherlands (EBB'99; EBB-elderly'97); SCP calculation

Key findings:

- It is not surprising that older men and women have a lower educational level than the reference group of adults aged 35-54, and that educational level declines with age. What is striking, however, is that the educational deficit of older men compared with the reference group of 35-54 year-olds is much small than that of older women.

Older people living in institutions

Educational distribution of residents of institutions and elderly living independently, aged 65 and over, 2000 (in percentages)

	Residents of institutions			Living independently		
	65-74 years	75-84 years	≥ 85 years	65-74 years	75-84 years	≥ 85 years
Primary education	49	57	60	32	41	54
Lower secondary education	35	31	26	27	24	19
Upper secondary/ higher education	16	12	15	41	35	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: SCP (0112000); Statistics Netherlands (EBB'99) SCP calculation

Key findings:

- Those with a lower educational level run a greater risk of ending up in an institution than those with a higher education, and at a somewhat younger age.

Forecast education level

Forecast education level of the population aged 55 and over 2000-2025 (in percentages)

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Men						
Primary education	22	19	16	14	12	11
Lower secondary education	21	20	20	20	20	29
Upper secondary education	36	38	39	39	40	41
Tertiary education	21	23	26	27	28	29
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Women						
Primary education	36	30	25	20	17	13
Lower secondary education	32	33	33	31	28	26
Upper secondary education	22	28	28	32	36	40
Tertiary education	10	12	14	17	19	22
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: SCP, based on Statistics Netherlands (population forecast; EBB-elderly'97, EBB'99)

Key findings:

- The educational level of both elderly men and women will increase further, so that by 2025 only 11-13% are forecast to have received only primary education. Roughly a quarter of the elderly will have a higher professional or university education background in 2025.
- According to the forecast, changes in the education level of the elderly occur only through the replacement of older, lower educated cohorts by younger cohorts who have a generally higher level of education, rather than as a result of adult education, migration or differences in life expectancy.

Definitions of Learning

The following definitions were used in the above surveys:

NIACE surveys - "Learning can mean practising, studying, or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full or part time, done at home, at work, or in another place like college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished."

National Adult Learning Survey – "Taught learning which could be: any courses that were meant to lead to qualifications; any taught courses designed to help you develop skills that you might use in a job; any courses, instruction or tuition in driving, in playing a musical instrument, in an art or craft, in a sport or in any practical skill; evening classes; learning which has involved working on your own from a package of materials; any other taught course, instruction or tuition."

"Non-taught learning which might be: studying for qualifications without taking part in a taught course; supervised training while you were actually doing a job; time spent keeping up to date with developments in the type of work you do without taking part in a taught course; deliberately trying to improve your knowledge about anything or teach yourself a skill without taking part in a taught course."

NIACE Surveys

Adult learning and social division : a persistent pattern, volume 1 : the full NIACE survey on adult participation in learning 2002.
Fiona Aldridge and Naomi Sargant. NIACE, 2002. ISBN 1862011559

Two steps forward, one step back : the NIACE survey on adult participation in learning 2002.
Fiona Aldridge and Alan Tuckett. NIACE, 2002. ISBN 1862011451.

Winners and losers in an expanding system : the NIACE survey on adult participation in learning 2001.
Fiona Aldridge and Alan Tuckett. NIACE, 2001. ISBN 1862011257.

The learning divide revisited : a report of a UK-wide survey on adult participation in education and learning.
Naomi Sargant. NIACE, 2000. ISBN 18620108891.

Across the learning divide : adults learning in the arts and crafts.
Shiela Carlton and Naomi Sargant. NIACE, 1998. ISBN 1862010617.

The learning divide : a study of participation in adult learning in the UK.
Naomi Sargant with John Field, Hywel Francis, Tom Schuller and Alan Tuckett. NIACE, 1997. ISBN 1862010161.

Beyond the boundaries – exploring the potential of widening participation in higher education
Julia Preece (ed), with Cal Weatherald and Maggie Woodrow. NIACE, 1998. ISBN 1 86201 047 1.

Fees Survey 2000-2001 : indicators of fee levels charged to part-time adult students by Local Education Authorities and Colleges. Fiona Aldridge. NIACE, 2001. ISBN 1862011230.

Other useful Surveys and Statistics

Age Discrimination in Public Policy: A Review of Evidence
Help the Aged, 2002. ISBN 0 90585267 2. Includes a section on age discrimination in education together with participation statistics.

DfES Statistical Bulletins and First Releases
Wide range of statistics covering education, training and employment including post-16 learning. Web Site: www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics

Education statistics actuals and estimates
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. CiPFA, Tel: 0171 543 5600 Web Site: www.ipf.co.uk/sis

Education and training statistics for the United Kingdom
The Stationery Office, 2000. ISBN 0 11 2711006.

Education at a glance: OECD indicators 2001
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001. Web Site: www.oecd.org

Learner Satisfaction Survey 2001/2
Learning and Skills Council, 2002. Available to download from www.lsc.gov.uk

National Adult Learning Survey 1997
Research report 49. DfEE, 1998. ISBN 0 85522 720 6 (NALS97). Summary also available.

National Adult Learning Survey 2001 DfES, 2001. ISBN 184185 652 5. Available to download from www.dfes.gov.uk

Pathways in adult learning
National Centre for Social Research. DfEE, 2000. ISBN 1 841580640.

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Includes a section on education and training. The Stationery Office, 2001. ISBN 0 11 621464 3. Available to download from www.statistics.gov.uk

Report on the Elderly in the Netherlands
Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands, 2001. ISBN 9037700829. Available to download from www.scp.nl

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